



Lincoln Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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March 24, 2000

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Department of the Army
Walla Walla District Corps of Engineers
Attention: Lower Snake River Study
201 North Third Avenue
Walla Walla, WA 99362-1876

Dear Sir or Madam:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on the Federal Caucus All-H documents and other documents dealing with conservation of Columbia Basin Fish. These comments are submitted on behalf of the 2,800 member-owners of Lincoln Electric Cooperative, Inc.. The cooperative, headquartered in Eureka, serves North Lincoln and North Flathead counties in Northwest Montana.

We recognize that salmon, as well as resident fish and wildlife are an important part of our heritage here in the Pacific Northwest. However, we also know that a strong healthy economy is critical to the well being of humans living in the region. We support the development of a comprehensive recovery plan that includes a clear vision, achievable goals and accountability that should be able to provide both fish recovery and a healthy economy. This should not be a fish versus economy issue. Both are critical to our region and we must be able to find ways to have both.

Any solution for fish recovery must also take into the account how it is going to affect those of us living in the region. Here in Northwest Montana we have been living with the attempts to recover salmon as each year Lake Koocanusa is drawn down to help flush salmon smolts through reservoirs further downstream. This water, which we seriously doubt helps any, is drawn down during our prime recreation season and has a serious impact on the local economy. Who wants to spend their vacation looking at a half-full reservoir? These draw downs are not only of questionable value in salmon recovery but may in fact be hurting our resident fish populations including the threatened bull trout.

It appears that some groups in the region are only focusing on removing dams as the answer to fish recovery. **We believe that until it can be scientifically proven taking out the dams will restore the salmon runs this should not be a viable option.** In fact, the latest results show that salmon smolt recovery is as high now as it was before the Snake River dams were built. With this being the case, it seems obvious that it makes no sense to remove the dams. The issue of fish recovery is much larger than just the four salmon runs that pass over the lower Snake River dams. We need to focus our efforts on coming up with a comprehensive regional plan for recovery instead of debating about taking out dams when it can not be shown the removal of the dams will help.

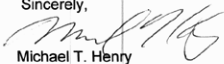
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The All-H paper intent to look at improving habitat, hatchery and hydropower operations and addressing harvest is commendable. All of these issues, as well as others, are important to the recovery of fish populations and it just emphasizes the need for a comprehensive plan. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has identified several unknown impacts that may affect recovery including climate and ocean and estuary conditions. It is critical that we get answers to how these will affect recovery before the region makes decisions that will affect our natural resources and way of life into the future.

The region needs to establish clear performance standards and goals that would allow us to set priorities and get results in recovering fish. While the All-H paper makes a beginning at this, the goals outlined conflict with each other and no guidelines are established for setting priorities making them unrealistic goals. The region must set realistic achievable goals if we are going to ever recover fish and have a healthy economy. As a region, we have spent billions of dollars and cannot show that we have achieved any results this has to change.

We encourage you to continue to move beyond debates that polarize the region, look beyond the theatrics that occurred at the recent public hearings, obtain and use good, credible science and work toward a comprehensive solution that is reasonable and achievable. Quit focusing on false solutions like dam breaching and massive flow augmentation that won't get results. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments and hope you will find these helpful.

Sincerely,



Michael T. Henry
General Manager

MTH:mr

Cc: Senator Baucus
Senator Burns
Representative Hill
State Representative Aubynn Curtis